Interview with David Nalle

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DAVID NALLE

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Q: David, we will start out by asking you some of your personal background and history and your education, and the things which led you to be an officer in the Agency.

Background and Training

NALLE: As far as background, I was born and brought up in Philadelphia, went to school there, and went to college just at the beginning of the Second World War, Princeton. My academic career there was interrupted, which was good, because I was trying to be an engineer and I wasn't suited for it.

I went into the service. I went into naval aviation, got my wings in Pensacola, flew around Kansas for a while, and then that was interrupted by the end of the war.

I went back to Princeton, majored in English literature, which prepared me not very well for the real world, so that when I got out of Princeton, I was faced with a negative job market and a not very salable educational background, which I mention because I was looking for a job in the publishing business in New York. I had a nice interview—in fact, the only nice interview that I had—with a woman at W.W. Norton, who had a connection with

Washington, unbeknownst to me, because she didn't offer me a job, but she did pass my name on to the State Department, which then had an information division, the exact name of which I forget. But it was all under the State Department, and they were recruiting to create what later became USIA.

Q: What year was this?

1951: Entrance into Predecessor to USIA

NALLE: That would be 1951. I got a call at a job I had in Yonkers, New York, at the time. I had just been married. The caller on the other end was from USIA, and she said, “Your name has been given to us, and we'd like to send you to Afghanistan.” [Laughter]

Q: As a beginning!

NALLE: I had a vague idea of where Afghanistan was, but that's about all. I guess my case was not nearly as severe as that of my mother, because when I said to her, “I'm thinking of going to Afghanistan,” she said, “Isn't that nice, dear? I've always been interested in the Balkans.” And that was about the state of our family knowledge of Afghanistan.

The whole idea intrigued me. I guess it intrigued my wife, and so we went through all the process, came down to Washington, and joined the Agency at that time.

Q: At that time, it was USI—

NALLE: It was actually called International Information Administration or something like that, part of the State Department. And it remained part of the State Department for two or three more years after that. Actually, I was in Damascus when they got around to the formal transfer of USIA people out of the State Department, and we all were required to take an examination on knowledge of the world and that sort of thing.

Q: Have you any idea how come they took you? Did you take any exams?

NALLE: Not a thing, no.

Q: Is there any rationale that you can figure, why they just said they wanted you in Afghanistan? It seems like such a bolt out of the blue.

NALLE: It was, indeed. I mean, if you're in Yonkers, New York, you don't associate your next week with Afghanistan. But it was simply that they had, somehow or other, the budget or mandate to build this up, and certain posts they had to fill. I don't even remember—I think the nice young woman at the publishing house, while I thought she was interviewing me for a job, she was really interviewing me on behalf of USIA. I guess I revealed enough knowledge for her to think that it was worth recommending me.

Q: Did you have any overseas experience before that?

NALLE: I had spent some time in France.

Q: But nothing extensive?

NALLE: No. And English literature.

Q: That's what I realized.

— And Assigned to Afghanistan in Summer of 1951.

NALLE: So I came down and went through a very brief orientation period, signed the necessary papers, and we were sent to Kabul, I guess, sometime in the summer of '51.

Q: So it was really a very short orientation.

NALLE: Yes. No language at all.

Q: What kind of orientation did they give you at that point?

NALLE: None that I can remember. I had, as far as I know, no preparation.

Q: That's interesting.

NALLE: This is a basic point which maybe I could make now. This is one of the great failings of the Agency, in my opinion, and has been over the years, and I think, to an extent, still is, that the people the Agency sends out are not prepared for the jobs they're undertaking, either professionally or as far as the culture of the country they're going to.

Q: Have you some ideas about what you think would be a good set of basics for this kind of training?

NALLE: I think language is the sine qua non. You must study the language, even if you don't become fluent in it. Or you should. Of course, it all costs money. That means you have to have a much larger corps in order to spend the time training in language and culture. But here I was going to a country, admittedly a small and distant and, at that time we judged a not very important country, but it was a Muslim country, it was a Middle Eastern country between South Asia and the Near East. Strategically, as we've learned since, very important. I was supposed to communicate with those people, so I should have been prepared. Admittedly, at that particular time, they were under some kind of pressure to build up the Agency, so I guess it was better to have someone over there than no one at all.

Indeed, when I went out, I was to be the librarian. I had no training in library work. I taught myself library work to an extent, and found it very interesting. Unfortunately, I never thought at the time that I would be in a country again where they spoke Persian, so I didn't learn much of the language in Afghanistan, which was unfortunate, because my next post was Meshed in Iran.

Kabul

Q: How many people were in Afghanistan when you were sent out? How many people were there doing so-called information work?

NALLE: I think we probably were not the first people there doing information work. I guess we were the second, but we were the first group that ever went there to do this particular function. Bill Astill was there as, I guess, the information officer, and the public affairs officer was a wonderful man named Joe Leaming, who was an author of a number of children's books and was a wonderful fellow, a great storyteller, great writer, totally unsuited for the work, I think, but literate and fun to be with and all that. Bill Astill was suited for the work and also was well educated and an interesting person. Then a young woman came, Dean Finley, who was to be the information officer, I guess, and Bill Astill must have been deputy PAO. So there we had about four officers all of a sudden in this remote place.

Living was fairly primitive, but we lived, obviously, much better than the local population, and it was basically quite comfortable.

Q: Did you get out of Kabul very much? You were the librarian. Did you start to build up the library, or was there something there?

NALLE: I actually built it, the building. I found the builder and started the building process with the help of the embassy. There were no such things as steel I beams. We had a Czech architect who invented a new kind of truss that would hold up enough ceiling so that you could have a big room for a library and film shows. The truss collapsed two and a half years later. It came down after I left. But we did build a nice, attractive library with American-style furnishings locally made. I was very pleased with that, I must say. It was an attractive library.

Q: Did you have guidance in putting the library together, with the nature of the collection?

NALLE: At that time, as I remember, the predecessor Agency had begun to send books out all over the world, so you got a core collection. We did order books in addition, according to what we divined were local interests. We, of course, catered to the foreign colony, as well as the indigenous people. There wasn't an awful lot of English spoken and read by the Afghans at the time, but there were many coming up who did. We had quite a good attendance—I obviously don't remember now—but very often you'd go in in the late afternoon and the library would be full. That was maybe 50 people. It was a small operation, but a very interesting one, and we showed USIA films, also, once a week. We had a music program and various other activities.

Q: So you almost served as the cultural center, didn't you?

NALLE: Yes. Oh, indeed. That's what it was. That was my job. The librarianship was minimal. I had to understand certain things that one doesn't know about, like the Dewey decimal system and Minnie B. Sears' book of subject headings, which was the Bible of a librarian. Once you've mastered Minnie B. Sears, you know everything. In fact, it really helps you organize the whole world in your mind.

Much as I loved Bill Astill, I must say, he tried to do the library before I came, and he did not really understand Minnie B. Sears. That was his only shortcoming.

Q: After all, Afghanistan at that point was essentially an illiterate country.

NALLE: Yes, I suppose 90 percent.

Q: So the students were the children of the elite, or who were getting ready to study outside of the country?

NALLE: Sort of a classic situation. The best high schools in town, the elite high schools, were run by teachers from certain foreign countries. There was an American high school called Habibia. There was a British high school called Ghazi. The French had a school.

The Germans had a school. Germans also had a technical college, as I remember. But they gave good education to these young people, and very often they got pretty good in English, so that they could, for example, come and work in the library and work in English for us, and also come and use the library.

The illiteracy rate in Kabul itself was considerably less than the national rate, which must have been well over 90 percent, I would say.

Q: Did you have any visitors, scholars of any kind, who came in and met with the groups? Have any lectures? Any of that kind of thing at that particular point?

NALLE: Of course, there was much less of it. We had one prominent visitor, Senator Knowland, who came out. This was at the time, of course, of the [Senator Joseph] McCarthy hearings, and [Roy] Cohn and [David] Schine were traveling about the more comfortable parts of the world, looking at the contents of American libraries. I've always been both embarrassed and secretly pleased by the fact that when Senator Knowland came, I took a quick review of the library collection, because we were warned that he was going to be looking at it, and I found one paperback copy of Dashiell Hammett, so I put it in my pocket during Senator Knowland's visit, and put it back as soon as he had left. But we were pretty far away; we weren't affected much by that.

One of the most interesting visitors, one of the most effective we had, was Leo Sarkisian. Do you know him?

Q: Yes, I know the name.

NALLE: I saw Leo just the other day at the USIA luncheon, because he was working with Voice of America and he now works from time to time for them. He's a musicologist and a painter and various other things. He came out and did recordings of Afghan music and played other folk music for them. We had an absolutely full house for his program. He is a great performer, and it was a very effective cultural program, qua cultural program. How

much it served the country objectives, I'm not sure, but perhaps as well as anything else we did. It showed a certain amount of respect for their culture and told them interesting things about our culture and other cultures.

Q: So it sounds like a very interesting time. It's interesting because it's so early in the Agency's beginnings.

NALLE: Not many people visited Kabul, as you can imagine. Not many other visitors come to mind.

Q: Do you remember who the ambassador was, by any chance?

NALLE: Oh, yes. Angus Ward was the ambassador, but he was at the end of my stay. At the beginning was George Merrill, a very nice man. He had been, I think, charg# d'affaires in India before he came to Afghanistan, and retired from Afghanistan, from Kabul. A very nice man, not really cut out for Afghanistan, perhaps. Jack Horner was the charg# d'affaires for some time before Angus Ward came with his cats.

Q: His cats?

NALLE: He was in Mukden and had been interned by the Japanese there, and got out of that with the cats, long-haired, as I remember, when he came to Kabul.

Q: You were in Kabul how long?

NALLE: Two and a half years, almost three years.

Q: So it was long enough to—

NALLE: I'll have to include here a biographical note. My first wife, Jane, died in Kabul after we had been there a year, I guess, and is buried there.

Q: Did she die of a locally contracted ailment?

NALLE: Yes, some kind of spinal meningitis. The medical care was not so great there, so I don't know that we were absolutely certain what it was, but it was something like that, and such things were available.

Q: Did she go out of the country for medical help?

NALLE: No.

Q: Was there a doctor at the embassy?

NALLE: It all happened too fast. No, there was a doctor at the British Embassy. There were some U.N. doctors there at the time, and they offered help and were brought in on the case.

Q: This is all part of the living conditions of people in the Foreign Service.

NALLE: Oh, yes. There was, when I was last in Kabul, a very attractive little cemetery which is populated by foreigners, obviously, and a number of Americans are there. Sir Aurel Stein is buried there, also. He's the biggest name, I guess, in the cemetery. Kabul's not a healthy place, except in some ways because it's high and dry and has lots of sunlight, it was healthier than India next door, but the sanitation, and all that sort of thing, was rather primitive.

Q: When I went out to my first post in Japan, I went out, of course, to the Pacific on the President Cleveland, and all the way over, I read Jim Michener's Afghanistan because it's such a fat book. I think it's the only Michener I've ever gotten all the way through. I guess he came after you left, but he must have been there for some time, because when I went out to Japan, it was 1963 and that book had been out a while.

NALLE: Yes. I never read that. He does a remarkable job. I read what he did on Spain.

Q: You went from Kabul to—I guess by that time you decided you were going to stay with this kind of business after that first stint in Kabul.

1954, Meshed, Iran

NALLE: Well, you know, one was very young. I got another message like the original one. “Would you like to go to Meshed, Iran?” That was next door, in effect. It was just being reopened after the reinstallation of the Shah of Iran, the ouster of [Mohammed] Mossadegh, because all those things, ours and the British, all the consulates had been closed at the end of the Mossadegh government. Then in late summer of '53, I guess, they were opened up again. I think I have the dates right. Anyway, I was the first USIA person to go there after the interruption.

Q: Had there been somebody stationed in Meshed before?

NALLE: A fellow named George Naifeh had been there during the Mossadegh period. I think he was the first USIA person, and he must have been there when I was in Kabul. Then he had to leave when the town was all closed down.

Q: Did you have home leave between Afghanistan and Meshed?

NALLE: Yes. It looks to me as if I went there in early 1954, and left in '56.

Q: So you went, really, from one very primitive post to another, and all of them in the Islamic world.

NALLE: Yes. It was in Meshed that I learned Persian. That was not because the Agency taught it to me. I should say, in response to your comment, that Meshed was considerably more developed and civilized and sophisticated than Kabul was in most ways.

Q: But it's a very conservative Islamic city, isn't it?

NALLE: As those kinds of cities are, usually, there was a religious section of the city and there was a secular section of the city. It was a fairly big place, so you could find all kinds of people there. You couldn't find many people who spoke English, though. We figured at one time there were 50 people in the city that we knew about who spoke English or French. So if I wanted to communicate with anybody, I really had to learn Persian. Indeed, I did that in the best kind of learning situation, because a large part of my work was publicizing the US AID program. It was called the Point Four program. That meant I had to go to meetings with both the local Ministry of Agriculture, the development people, and the Ministry of Education. All these meetings were conducted in Persian, and it would get boring with an interpreter all the time. So knowing the context and being in a meeting, you get to know the words and you get to acquire them quite easily. It's not a very difficult language. I wish I had learned it in Afghanistan. Same language, essentially. But I did learn it in Meshed, and that was very useful. Of course, it greatly expands your ability to communicate and understand what's going on.

Q: Did you just learn spoken Persian, or did you also begin to cope with the Arab script?

NALLE: Both.

Q: I found in my brief encounter with the Persian language at FSI, one of the things I liked about it was that I had the feeling it was very like my Latin background, that there was a formation of—I don't know how much Latin you've had, but it seemed to me there was-a familiarity in Persian because of Latin, and I found it very delightful for that particular reason.

NALLE: Yes. I had studied Latin all through school. I think that helps you as a background to learning language. Persian, fortunately, is not really an inflected language; it's much easier than Latin. So it's easier to acquire.

Q: Did you get any training at all before you moved, when you went home on leave? Was it just leave, or did you have any training to go to Iran?

NALLE: Only home leave.

Q: No training?

NALLE: No. I arranged lessons in Meshed while I was there.

Q: But I thought maybe something else.

NALLE: No.

Q: What did you do in Meshed?

Publicizing Point Four

NALLE: A large part of the job was publicizing the AID program, which was a very interesting thing to be thrown into, because it was a tremendously ambitious and largely effective program, really a program designed to help the ordinary Iranians live better, improve their standard of living, and become more prosperous. In many ways it helped accomplish that, I think. My job was selling a product that I could be proud of, and I was like a reporter, photographer, writer. I would go out and cover projects that were being implemented, and I would go into the schools where they were doing practice teaching and training teachers and so forth, take pictures and write up stories. USIS headquarters in Tehran would incorporate those into a magazine that they put out and distributed all over the country.

Q: Which magazine is this?

NALLE: I forget what it was called now, but it was a USIS-Tehran magazine. Of course, all of this was a little paternalistic, because they not only put out a magazine, they did radio

programs, they put out a wall newspaper which I had to get posted in villages and things like that. It was in some ways an oppressive relationship because America was all over Iran, and everybody knew that these slick magazines and so forth didn't come from an Iranian source; they came from the Americans. But that takes nothing away from the fact that the experimental farm they established outside of Meshed was the first one ever. It did some great things in improving crops for the area. The trench silos that got dug under their direction were a vast improvement over anything that had ever been there in recent times, and helped people.

Q: was there much of an AID staff out there?

NALLE: Yes, quite a large one. It was a big program. It was also the time of trying to make a real impact on Iran after the debacle of the Shah being, as the Iranians saw it, really placed back on the throne by the Americans and the British. That left a bad taste in their mouths and made them less trusting of us than they had been previously.

There was something called the Impact program, which was an overlay of money for the USAID program, to make an impact, to do things that would be visible, and would show Iranians that it was a good thing to be allied to the Americans because they would help you. And it meant building a school, for example, or building a dam, or building this or building that. Not always the best conceived projects, no, but more dramatic than helping them train teachers.

Q: In how many locations were we located at that particular point? Did they grow in numbers subsequently?

NALLE: Meshed and Tabriz and Isfahan. I think there was somebody in Khorramshahr in the south. I don't think it ever got any bigger than that.

Q: Not Shiraz?

NALLE: In Shiraz there was a binational center.

Q: Who was running the program in Tehran?

NALLE: Bob Payne.

Cultural Programs

Q: I'm interested. Were you under a lot of heavy directives from Tehran, or did you do what seemed best for the situation in Meshed?

NALLE: I only occasionally heard from Tehran, and I did what I thought best. They did send me some things, like they sent me, for example, an art exhibit, which the agency had done on metal panels. It was really very nicely done. It was a retrospective of American art, so it went from that picture of Jefferson and everybody at the Continental Congress right up to Arthur Dove and beyond. So I put that on in the public library in the heart of Meshed. I think it was the first art exhibit that had been held in Meshed since the 15th century, probably, which was, of course, the period of the peak of the Titurids. And until they got to modernists, it was very popular with the visitors. They felt insulted by John Matin and Arthur Dove and people like that. “Why are they putting this kind of nonsense in front of me?” But it was a great success. That was a lot of fun. We did get a few things like that.

I must say the most memorable communication I got from Bob Payne was when William Warne, who was head of AID, came up from Tehran to open a community development project in a town outside Meshed. As a reporter, I had to report on this. I got Mr. Warne's speech and sent it back to Tehran, and the speech of the local Point Four director, and sent that back to Tehran. I was having the Persian speeches translated, which took an endless amount of time. The message I got from Bob Payne was simply, “What did the Iranians say?” Because I had first sent him just the American side.

Q: It's really kind of fun when you have a place which is your own and you can do what you think the situation demands in order to accomplish certain kinds of goals.

NALLE: For example, I became the first English instructor at the newly opened University of Meshed. I taught a class of about 20 young people there, which was rewarding, because this was the whole spectrum of society, people who were educationally upwardly mobile, including women, as well as men, which was very exciting for them because they'd never been in a coeducational situation. I had one mullah in my class, also, who was a lovely fellow, not very good in English, but a nice fellow. As is often the case, the girls were the best in the class.

Q: Did the girls wear chadors?

NALLE: Not at all.

Q: The Shah had already started this?

NALLE:It had been that way for some time, and at that time it would have been regarded as against the principles of the higher education institution to have women in chadors. They came in modest dresses, very proper. I used to have conversation teas at my house. I had a very pleasant house with a garden, as most Iranian houses had at that time.

Q: It gives you a chance to get close to the people with whom you are working, doesn't it, this kind of thing?

NALLE: Yes. Of course, it's terribly satisfying to one as a person to be in that sort of situation. Here you are, particularly if you're in USIS instead of the embassy, you're accessible and you're moving about in the community, and you have things like English teaching that you can do, or bringing in exhibits or whatever it is, or get them in line for a Fulbright exchange grant or things like that. You really become a member of the community.

The question comes up, I guess, if you compare it to later jobs as one becomes more senior: which really makes more impact?

When you pass out 7,000 copies of something or other that nobody's going to read? Or when you spend time at conversation teas in your house in Meshed and really get to know people?

Q: I think a lot of people in USIA feel that this is what makes the job so special in the Foreign Service, that if you like people and you're interested in other cultures, this is what —

NALLE: This was true, again, when I served in Moscow, because there, being in cultural work, one could have many more contacts than anybody else in the embassy could, because the Soviets could say to their people watching them, “It's culture and we're cultural, so we can talk to these people.” Some of the most satisfying experiences we had in Moscow were as a result of our knowing people there.

Teaching English on Meshed Radio

In Meshed I did another thing which was rather interesting. I was on Meshed Radio. I had an English-teaching program on the radio, which I wrote and voiced myself, with the help of some other people. I'm sure it was dreadful, pedagogically speaking, but there was nothing else available, and we could do it in English and the local language. So we did that. I often wondered whether in the Soviet Union anybody learned English from Radio Meshed, because Meshed was the American diplomatic installation closest to what we called then the Iron Curtain. It was only 40 air miles from the Soviet border. Surely they could hear Radio Meshed.

Q: These days, to have access to a radio show, a national venture, and put on your own radio show, is really kind of fascinating.

NALLE: Not quite the way it should be, and it wouldn't be anymore.

Q: What was regarded as professional in terms of quality then would probably be very different now. Everything was much more in the early stages of development.

NALLE: Yes. The colonial attitude, a special variation of it in Iran, then permitted that sort of thing. It would not, obviously, today. A foreigner would not have such access to their radios today.

Q: You've said the living conditions, however, except for the fact that there were fewer foreigners, were better in Meshed than in Kabul, the sanitary conditions.

NALLE: Yes, ten years, at least, better, maybe 20, 25. I had a house with a small garden, a few fruit trees, and so forth. I had a bicycle and rode around on my bicycle. There weren't many cars. We had an office car. I hired a small staff, a driver and a cultural assistant.

Q: You were the only American for the Information Service?

NALLE: Yes. It's maybe of interest that at first, the consul was Donald Webster, who was a former professor, particularly in Turkish studies. He knew about Islam, uniquely, I think, on the staff. A very nice man, an older man, married. He was succeeded by Bruce Laingen, whom you know.

Q: Yes.

NALLE: Also a fellow named Tom Cassilly. I forget who came first, Tom Cassilly or Bruce Laingen. They were both single. We had one CIA person and one or two American administrative assistants.

Q: So you were a very small community, even yourselves.

NALLE: That's right. And the British were not allowed to come back, or did not choose to come back to their consulate. There was a Pakistani consul and not much else. A wonderful climate, beautiful fruits, cherries as big as golf balls, absolutely beautiful. An idyllic spot, in many ways, to live, which most people don't realize, or didn't realize.

Q: It's high. It's pretty high, isn't it?

NALLE: It's not terribly high; it's just a favorable climatic position.

Q: So it was a high plateau. Well, from Meshed, you did what?

1956: The Voice of America — and Iran — The Shah's Objectionto Unpleasant News

NALLE: Then I came back to Washington and went to work in the Voice of America. I, first of all, was in charge of the Iranian service, the Persian service, and then I became branch chief for Greece, Turkey, and Iran, which meant largely being referee between the Greeks and the Turks. I was kind of acting deputy for the Near East Division, because there wasn't anybody else there. That was a fascinating learning experience, also. We did, I think, some really exciting programming for the Iranians. For people interested in that particular subject, Iranian-American relations, that gave me a good perspective many years later when the question came up of should we have a Persian broadcast, the service having been suspended, I guess in the late '70s. We were deciding should we have broadcasting in Persian because of what was then going on in Iran.

But, while I was head of the Persian service in the Voice of America, Bob Payne was still in Tehran, I think, and we used to get these rockets saying the Shah had objected to something the Voice of America said. We had this awkward situation where the Shah didn't expect the Voice of America to tell the truth about Iran, so he would call the ambassador and say, “Look, this is what the Voice of America said in Persian last night to my people.” Of course, the embassy would react, saying, “We must tell the Voice

of America.”Q: What kind of things were you saying that the Shah would—was this editorialized?

NALLE: No. It was news.

Q: Straight news.

NALLE: Somebody was killed, or persecuted, or this or that happened, or something about Ayatollah Kashani, I guess it was then. Or something that an Iranian expatriate in America said that had enough significance to be broadcast. It was, in my judgment, even more impossible in the later situation in the '70s—it would have been more impossible—to put an honest Voice of America broadcast on the air, because there were so many things that we would have had to say that would upset the Shah, that it just wouldn't have been worth it, because also at the same time, people would not have believed your broadcast if you didn't cover everything that was newsworthy, favorable to the Shah or not. I forget why they took the Persian service off the air. I think maybe it was just budgetary, but certainly a contributing factor was the fact that the Shah didn't like it when VOA broadcast the truth. It was a dilemma created by the “special relationship” with the Shah, who regarded VOA as the voice of the U.S.

Q: That's interesting that they would react that way because of the Shah. I can't imagine that we would do anything of the sort in recent years. I mean, I'm not talking just about the Shah, but anybody else.

NALLE: It's a very difficult job to be an ambassador to a country like Iran was at that time, or like Jordan was when I was there, because the ambassador must have a good relationship with the King. You can't exist as a successful ambassador unless you do. And if you do, there are certain commitments you make in maintaining that relationship, if only the commitment to argue with Washington if Washington's doing something that the King or the Shah doesn't like. If it's Voice of America, then you get into this credibility question and all that. If it's an autocratic ruler, VOA broadcasts aren't the only area where it comes

up. There was an ambassador in Jordan who didn't see it as the exclusive responsibility of his job to get along with the King, and he shortly was asked to leave.

Q: I was going to say, I can't imagine he lasted very long.

NALLE: No. And he was well equipped, objectively speaking, as an ambassador. He was very well thought of.

Q: How long were you in Washington at the VOA?

NALLE: A little more than two years. About two years, I think.

Q: This was 1955 to about '57?

NALLE: Yes.

Q: Did you find coming back home very difficult, after living the kind of life you obviously had in both Kabul and Meshed? Were there cultural problems of readjustment?

NALLE: I suppose there were, but I didn't recognize them.

Q: It didn't bother you?

NALLE: I was happy to be back. I'd lost my first wife, and I think I was eager to get back into American life. I don't remember particularly any re-entry problems.

Q: That's good. You were at the VOA for two years.

NALLE: Yes.

Q: And then?

NALLE: Then I got married again to Peggy, my present wife.

Q: You went on your honeymoon to Damascus.

1958: Damascus - Cultural Affairs Officer (CAO)

NALLE: So to speak, yes. Actually, as far as liveable cities, I guess I was moving upwards, because Damascus at that time was a very attractive city. This was in the period when Damascus and Egypt were allied in the United Arab Republic. It was one of the few periods of tranquility in Syrian history before Hafez al-Assad took over. It was a very interesting city, not particularly hospitable to Americans, and certainly not to American policy, but there again, because of the fact that I was cultural, the CAO, there, more than anybody in the embassy, I think, I had access to the community. We made some very good friends there and did, I think, some useful things. But there again, as had been true in Iran in a rather subterranean, buried way, you were working in a society where the natural bent of the young and intellectually aware people was to be anti-American.

Q: Why is this so?

NALLE: Because, in Iran, we were the new colonial power taking the place of the British, in effect, and as became much more pronounced later, we were insulting the masculinity, the national dignity, whatever, of the Iranian people by showing them what to do, giving them money to do it, telling them how to do it, and so forth. Of course, there was a different cause in Damascus: it was the Arab-Israeli situation and our policy towards Israel, which made it very difficult for the ordinary politically oriented Syrian to be friendly with us. But there again, if one could use the excuse of culture, one could deal with the Americans.

We had a library and cultural center there in Damascus, which did very well. We had a lot of nervous moments when some new American policy initiatives favored Israel and students would begin to demonstrate. I think they attacked the center once while I was there. But we had a full-scale program and published books in Arabic, put on cultural presentations. At that time, the Agency was sending out a fair number of cultural activities

and visitors, and we were beginning to get professors at Damascus University, which was something I started while I was there. The Agency never did send me to study Arabic, which was unfortunate, but I did speak French, and that worked in Damascus at the university.

Q: But it was the French that you had before you went into the service.

NALLE: Yes.

Q: How much of a staff was there then in Damascus, USIA staff?

NALLE: PAO and CAO.

Q: That's all? Just the two of you?

NALLE: And secretary.

Q: Who was the PAO?

NALLE: Bob Lincoln was both PAO and CAO when I got there, and then after a while, Don Shea came to be PAO.

Q: In Damascus, after all, you're in a capital city and the home of the embassy and so forth. Of course, that was true in Kabul, too. But you still had a great deal of freedom in what you did and what you decided to do and this kind of thing?

NALLE: Yes, except the constraints were much more apparent in the Syrian context.

Q: That's because of policy problems?

NALLE: Yes. We really were very careful about what you did and even where you went.

Q: can you remember any examples of this?

NALLE: I remember when we got there, we were put up in the Omayyad Hotel, which was one of two first-class hotels then. After we'd been there a day or two, we got a note from the ambassador. He had not called us or said anything to us, because the Omayyad Hotel was assumed to be bugged. The note said, “We think you should move up to the residence.” Actually, he wasn't ambassador; he was still consul general because Syria was in the union with Egypt.

Q: Who was this?

Tensions Caused by July 14, 1958 Landing in Lebanon

NALLE: Parker T. Hart. He would have been the ambassador, except for the union. He was consul general and very good, an Arabist. So we did move up to the residence, very comfortable. We arrived there on July the Fourth and the Marines landed in Beirut on July 14th, I believe, in reaction to the overthrow of the King in Baghdad, in Iraq. So it was a time of great turmoil and worry about what the reaction of the mob would be, so to speak, to these adverse developments. I guess the consul general knew about the forthcoming landing. That was one reason we had to move to a safer place.

But the day of the landing, I forget who it was, somebody in the embassy had scheduled a big reception to greet the new cultural attach# and his wife. We went to the party without knowing about the landing. The Syrians had been listening to the radio and they all knew about the landing, except for this one fellow, whom I've since seen here in the States, who had been on a picnic. He came. He was the only Syrian who came to the reception.

I remember the Italian charg# d'affaires. We stood in the front room on the street side of this apartment, waiting in line to greet all the many Syrians who were going to come in, and the Italian charg# came up to us and said, “You shouldn't stand here. Come with me.” We went back into the dining room, and the dining room was full of people, foreign diplomats, because it was away from the street. They all were brave enough to come but

savvy enough to expect that if there was a bomb going to be thrown, it would be thrown in the front window and everybody in the front room would be demolished. Fortunately, no bomb was thrown.

Q: It did not happen?

NALLE: But it was interesting that that room was empty and the dining room was chock-a-block with people.

Q: There's something about the antennae of people who live in these situations, not just the nationals, but I mean anybody who's living there, if they've got any experience. I'm not talking about people who might be brand new. But where to go and what to do. This reminds me of when things were going all wrong in Iran in '78 and '79, and we had the American Studies Conference. The University in Shiraz moved the entire conference into an inner set of rooms, because there was fighting between the students and the police. Exactly the same kind of thing.

NALLE: The Arab world at that time was very much of a radio civilization and may still be. But all the Syrians would have been listening to two or three radio broadcasts during all of the day.

Q: Was the BBC functioning, also?

NALLE: Yes, BBC and VOA. They would all listen to one of those. They'd listen to a local station to find out what the line was. Damascus radio probably would not have broadcast that there had been a landing. They all listened to Radio Israel so they would have—

Q: All points of view.

NALLE: Yes. Out of that, they would get the real story.

Q: The program that you carried out, obviously there was a library and you had speakers. Was the library attacked while you were there in Damascus?

NALLE: I can't remember. I don't think so, actually. It wasn't seriously attacked. I think we had to close down at various times to avoid it. I don't think we were physically attacked.

Q: So this was your first real encounter with policy problems of the Arab world and the Israeli world, I take it.

NALLE: Yes.

Q: The others had been a different set of obligations. What kind of living conditions did you have after you moved out of the residence?

NALLE: We had a lovely apartment in a relatively new section of Damascus. Damascus also has a wonderful climate. At that time it was a lovely city; now I guess it's vastly overgrown. It was famous in the Middle East for its gardens around the outside of the city, and the old city; they call it the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world.

Q: Did you get to travel around very much in the country, or did you focus within Damascus?

NALLE: We traveled some, because Aleppo related to Damascus the way New York relates to—or used to—Washington. Aleppo was a large city and the Aleppans felt they were more cultured. That's no longer anywhere near true, but there was some justification for it then. We did do programs in Aleppo and towns in between, but there wasn't much except Damascus and Aleppo.

Q: How did your new wife like the Foreign Service?

NALLE: Very much, I think, even though it was quite different from her previous professional life. Peggy's a very good bridge player, and that was a useful way to meet a

certain important class of Syrians. Peggy also spoke French. We did that, played bridge quite often. It was a pleasant place to live. Our first child, David, was born there—actually not in Damascus, but in Beirut.

Q: While you were stationed in Damascus?

NALLE: While we were stationed there. Our pediatrician in Damascus said, “My basic advice to you is don't have your child here. Have it in Beirut.” So we did that.

Q: Of course, at that time, Beirut was a fine city with great cosmopolitan—

NALLE: Oh, indeed. Wonderful place. That's where one went for R&R. It was interesting to me, in retrospect, when you went from Syria to Lebanon and you crossed the border, you had this wonderful feeling of release, that you were suddenly free and unobserved and just like anybody anywhere, after you'd been conscious all the time in Damascus of people watching you. We used to have in Damascus, when we'd give a reception, one person at least who would come who wasn't invited. They often came in black turtlenecks, and they would stand in the corner. They would look at your guests. It put a certain damper on the conversation. But what I started to say was that, in retrospect, the feeling of going from Syria to Lebanon was exactly what you had when you went from Moscow to Helsinki. Once you left and got on the airplane to leave Moscow, you suddenly felt as if a great weight had been taken off the top of your head and you were going back to the normal way of life, where you weren't watched all the time.

Q: I felt that myself after taking a tour around the Soviet Union in 1959. We were in the Soviet Union for three weeks. We landed in Warsaw, and I started to negotiate with the Poles, which was required, and it was the same thing. I am so interested that you used that phrase. It was like a physical weight being lifted from one's shoulders somehow. I wonder what this means when you have to live in this society with no hope of getting out, the implications of this.

NALLE: It's kind of sad. I remember being on one plane leaving Moscow, and as soon as the wheels left the ground, spontaneously everybody in the plane started to applaud. I thought, “What must the Soviets think?” [Laughter] All these people applaud the leaving of the Soviet Union.

Q: They did that out of Iran, too, when things were really critical.

NALLE: Of course.

Q: Once the wheels were up. Have you got anything else that you'd like to tell us about your stint there in Damascus? Anything unusual? Any changes that seem to be occurring? Was the policy focus all concerned with the Israeli-Arab situation? You had all that AID experience earlier. What was the heavy focus?

Obligatory Obeisance to Syrian Criticism of American PolicyBut Two Program Events Were Very Useful

NALLE: To do business, you had to talk first about the failures and the faults of American policy. You had to listen to that, and you had to say, “Well, there's some merit to what you say.” Then you put that aside. I think one's interlocutor did the same thing. You had to address that. You had to acknowledge that problem in our relationship. Then you talked about your business. Then we did very useful things. We brought, as I said, the first group of—I think it was four professors from American universities, who came and worked in Damascus University. They, again, as I was in Meshed, were directly in contact with these students, having set aside the policy problem. They formed wonderful friendships and relationships with these people, and also taught them something at the same time.

I suppose our real triumph in Damascus was putting on the American booth at the Damascus International Fair. I meet people occasionally who still remember it. The Agency initially declined to fund it, and the Syrians were really insulted, because the Syrians, certainly then and for some time afterwards, were really oriented towards

America. They had nothing in common with the Soviets. They really don't like other Arabs, and they looked toward America. There were lots of Syrian Americans, obviously, and lots of contacts. So the Syrians, I think, persuaded the consul general that we really should do something, so we got, I remember, $11,000. That's all we had to put this thing on. We sort of built it by hand with the help of a very generous Armenian contractor who did most of it free, and we put this thing together in something like six weeks.

We got some things like a Polaroid camera and a solar energy exhibit that happened to be wandering around the world from the Agency, and we made up a lot of things around it locally. Streams of people came in. Of course, the Soviets were there with an enormous exhibit of tractors and Sputniks and things like that. We had the most people. We had an American restaurant there with hamburgers and things like that, cooked by—at least the cooks were taught by the American community, how to make hamburgers and hot dogs. We dressed it up just the way a Burger King would be here.

Q: Shades of McDonald's in Moscow.

NALLE: Yes. Then with a solar cooker from the solar energy exhibit, Peggy would prepare each day batter for making 1,000 chocolate chip cookies. So our car smelled forever after of chocolate chip cookie batter, because every day we'd drive down to the fairgrounds with a car full of these pans of batter. But it was a tremendous success. I would take Polaroid pictures of the people and hand them out. Peggy would hand them chocolate chip cookies. It was a Mom and Pop operation, but tremendously successful.

Q: That's a great experience when you think of how many thousands of dollars now go into these fairs that go on.

NALLE: Yes.

Q: You were in Damascus two years?

1960: Back to Iran as Tehran Binational Center Director

NALLE: Two years, yes. Then I went to Tehran to be head of the Binational Center.

Q: What year was that?

NALLE: We must have gone there at the end of the summer of '60.

Q: Did you request this post?

NALLE: I don't think so.

Q: You sort of never requested anything for an assignment. [Laughter]

NALLE: No. No, not at all.

Q: But obviously you were moving up.

NALLE: I'll tell you how I got to Moscow later. But that was a fascinating job in Tehran, really. You mentioned Bob Lincoln. Well, I guess I'm getting ahead of myself there.

Anyway, I was head of the Binational Center. Bob Bauer had been head of it before me. Do you know Bob?

Q: Yes.

NALLE: A very difficult act to follow, if only because Bob has a wonderful story for every occasion, and I don't. So I'm sure I disappointed many of the people in the Binational Center because I wasn't as well equipped as Bob was in that regard. But Bob raised the money to build a new center, so I got there and spent most of my stay there, I guess, as head of the center in its old building downtown. Then we moved up the hill to Abbasabad.

It was only towards the end of my stay, actually, that we moved, as I remember, because I spent very little time actually working in the new building.

Q: Who designed that big new building, the set of buildings?

NALLE: Two American architects, Brown and Daltas. They were Americans who were doing business in Iran.

Q: But the basic concept of what the Center was supposed to be all about, this is what's so unusual about that Tehran Center, is the series of buildings, the kind of facilities it has.

NALLE: As far as I know, it was done largely by Bob Bauer. The important thing is that the Binational Center in Tehran really was binational. The majority on the board was Iranian. They had to approve the design, as well. They were usually quite tolerant of what the Americans wanted to do, because the Americans put the money in. It was a considerable amount of money. A lot of people criticized the building, but I think it was done in the right way. The Americans consulted the Iranians and got them to go along, and consulted the architects, who were Americans, told them what the function was supposed to be. Of course, they could see the old building and the old operation and they knew what it did. They designed this building, which was supposed to reflect the Iranian approach to architecture, as well as the American approach to using the building and the function. As I say, I never really worked in it, but I liked it.

When I later became head of the area, I went back there often to see it, and I thought it had great potential. It was something which was used. It had a wonderful stage in the middle, which could be opened to indoor or outdoor seating.

Q: So what kind of things were you doing at the Binational Center when you were there?

NALLE: At any given moment there were 5,000 Iranians on our campus studying English. Except maybe for Thailand, I think it was the largest English-teaching operation that the Agency had. We did our own books, because the Agency didn't provide decent books.

Q: You mean you published books in English-language training?

NALLE: Yes. We hired a trained English-language professional and had her write the books, and we published them, paid for them out of income and so forth. We paid for most of the cost of running the center's cultural program. We also ran something that started under Bob Bauer, a Student Center across the street from the main gate of Tehran University, which was run by Mokhadereh Ziai, and was, to some extent because of her strength of character, autonomous. We tried to involve Americans there in conversation teas and things like that as much as possible, and it was, I think, a very useful center. I think, in a way, she was right in wanting autonomy. There was more success with less American participation than with more, because the students were, by that time, by 1962-63, beginning to be severely disaffected. There had been, not long before, an attempt on the Shah's life. For students, being associated with the Americans was not a popular thing by that time. This was still quite some time before the revolution.

Religion and Politics in Iran

Q: Why was this so? Do you remember, David? How did this disaffection arise—was it because of U.S. relations with the Shah? Where was the basis for the disaffection, as you saw it at that point?

Seeds of Revolution Probably Laid by U.S. Inspired Overthrow of Mossadegh in 1953

NALLE: As I saw it, I think, and as I've talked to people about it subsequently, I do not think it was religious, by and large. I don't think religion was a real factor in the minds of the young and politically active. In fact, I think, the majority of them paid no attention

to religion. They were essentially Muslim culturally, but secular, otherwise. I think it was nationalistic, politically speaking.

The removal of Mossadegh was, in my estimation, a tragic mistake on the part of the United States. We caused, in effect, the Khomeini revolution by doing that. There were additional causes added along the way that made it turn out the way it has turned out. But essentially, the seeds of that revolution were planted then, because we insulted the Iranians nationally, as a nation.

Who knows what might have happened had Mossadegh stayed on, if we and the other forces that removed him had not come into play? It would have been a mess, because Mossadegh really didn't have control of the country or its various economic problems. But it would have been an Iranian mess, rather than one we created, and they would have worked it out in some way. It's a very sophisticated country in many ways. It was then and still is. They would have worked out a path to being a modern country, which they have not become. It might not have pleased us, and they might have been—although I don't think so—more friendly to the Soviet Union than we would have liked in the Cold War, but they are much more afraid of the Soviet Union than even we are, for good reason.

So we interrupted the normal course of Iranian history. Iran would have gone its own way, and we would not have become the scapegoat, the great Satan, or whatever.

Q: In those final months of 1978, when I was in Tehran, any number of people at parties and other places would talk to me about U.S. removal of Mossadegh, and I often thought, subsequently, whether they felt that maybe we could also remove the Shah and do something to correct the situation. When I tried to say that the United States did not have that kind of power, of course, nobody believed me. They thought I was just making conversation or throwing it off. But this combination of references came up regularly, so that what you're saying about Mossadegh seems to me very appropriate over this long haul of our relations with Iran.

NALLE: I think none of us recognized what was coming in Iran. I think one of the reasons was that, paradoxically, Iranians, so often when they would take you aside, would say things like that. They'd say that the Shah, and, especially, his family and the court were corrupt. They didn't often get specific on the corruption issue, but they would say, “The Shah uses Savak to oppress the people,” and so forth. They said it so often and they said it really so freely that you began to tune out, you began to disbelieve. “These people are just talking. They don't really mean this. That's their way of expressing themselves. It doesn't really mean that they're against the Shah, or want to do away with him.”

Of course, by and large, most of the people, I think, that the Americans were in contact with, while they didn't like the Shah's way of ruling and the corruption and the policies he imposed that didn't agree with their view of the way things should be, I think, none of them wanted the mullahs to take over. I've discussed this with others since. My distinct impression from living there for five years was that just about everybody was contemptuous of the mullah class, not necessarily all the Ayatollahs, but the mullah class, in general, was the object of derision, rather than respect, the cause, in the eyes of most people, of the troubles of the country, in the area of education and so forth.

So it was a mixed thing. We got tired of hearing this over and over again, hearing them say this, and obviously never seeing them do anything about it. So we discounted this, said, “That's the way they talk. They don't really want to get rid of the Shah.” But there again, you have this peculiar psychological point—I don't know whether anybody's analyzed it—that our reimposing the Shah on the country, a King, when kings are no longer fashionable in the modern world, was, in effect, putting them down, was castrating them, in effect. I think everyone resented it one way or another, consciously or unconsciously.

Q: So you were there for a five-year stint?

NALLE: I had been there two-plus years in Meshed and two and a half years in Tehran.

Q: When you became director of the Near East, South Asia area, this was in the late '70s.

NALLE: Early '70s first. I was twice director of the area.

Q: So you visited Iran. What I'm trying to say, in the course of your career, you were in and out of Iran for longer periods or shorter periods over a period running from the '50s into the late '70s.

NALLE: Yes.

Q: So it's 20 years of observations we're talking about here.

NALLE: With time out for being in Moscow, where you never heard much about the outside world, so I didn't know what was going on then. Most of my career was associated with Iran in one way or another.

Q: Did you find an evolving situation? You were talking about Mrs. Ziai at the Student Center and the beginning of student disaffection. Were you aware, over this whole period of 20 years, of very much of a change? Or did it occur very slowly? How do you evaluate the relations with the United States? Was there disillusionment, or was it all still based on our earlier action?

NALLE: Meshed was sort of an idyllic situation, and it was still far enough away physically and close enough to the Mossadegh overthrow that it had not hardened into any political expression that was clearly discernible—to a foreigner, at least. But I was surprised when, later, I was working in Tehran and would go to the Student Center, and I would try to mix in with the student visitors. I found, to my surprise, there were people, students, who would not speak to me, or people who would speak, turn away, and leave, apparently not desiring to speak to an American, which is something I had never found anywhere in Iran —and didn't find with the older people in the Iran-America Society downtown. There was obviously a serious disaffection among the young.

I used to go occasionally to the classes at the IAS Language Institute, where they were studying English. I found there also there was not the same kind of open welcoming that I had been accustomed to finding when meeting a group of Iranians. Especially when I spoke Persian, Iranians before would open up and be forthcoming. But that became less so. Certainly with a significant segment of the young population, there was a turning away from America, a turning off. Again, I think it was largely nationalistic, because we were seen as what the British had been. Of course, even after the British were no longer a significant player, there was the lasting impact of the hundred years of British imposition of their will on Iran, and Iranians couldn't let go of blaming the British—but we Americans were out front and we were doing the things that were contrary to their expression of their own national will, so to speak.

In Iran, Religion at First was More a Political Toolto Gain Power

And the fact that religion came in later was partly because of what we see all over the Muslim world now—and in other cultures—where religion can be used as a tool if you have a political objective. If you want to express yourself politically, one of the tools you have is your religion. You may demonstrate in a religious way, but your primary objective is still political. This, I think, we'll find coming up in Soviet Central Asia, where it's not so much that they're “fundamentalists” and want to turn their area into a religious republic, or whatever Iran is, but it's that they find it a convenient tool to express themselves with.

Q: Would you say that the Ayatollah (Khomeini) was, in the first instance, political because of his relations or his hatred of the Shah?

NALLE: Absolutely.

Q: Then he used his religion.

NALLE: Yes. I think he used his religion, maybe unconsciously, but to get back at the Shah for having kicked him out and having been disrespectful to him and to the religion.

Obviously, he was a serious, religious man, too. But by and large, the public—there's a very interesting book I've read recently that reports conversations with people in villages in this period after the revolution. They say exactly what I expected they would feel, but it still surprised me that they would say it. They were saying, “This guy, he's using religion. He's just like the mullahs we have around here, who get paid, don't do anything for us, make us listen to their sermons, don't do us any good, and aren't really religious. They're just living off the fat of the land, and we're the ones doing the work and have to pay for it.” That's still going on in Iran. There is this whole body of people who are sensible, practical, and not necessarily anti-American.

Q: What did you find were the most successful kinds of programs you put on at the Center, besides the English, obviously?

NALLE: I suppose I'd have to say good speakers from outside if we could get them to the Center.

Q: Americans and foreigners?

NALLE: Americans. We hosted a party for Lyndon Johnson at one time, which was one of the most interesting, when he was vice president and came through.

Q: That's when he got involved with a camel driver.

In the Early '50s the English Teaching and Student CenterPrograms were Most Important USIS Activities

NALLE: In Pakistan. There are a lot of interesting stories, and I won't go into them. But I suppose the Student Center and English-teaching were the most important things we did, but the cultural programs that we put on that were well designed and of interest to the intellectuals did bring them in. Poetry readings, for example, just reading Iranian poetry or American poetry, were a respectful effort to communicate with Iranians, and were greeted

that way. Just taking poetry as an example, that's something they prize and value. People who would not otherwise deal with Americans would come to the Binational Center to take part in such a program. They might not be gracious about it, because they didn't want you; they wanted the program. But they would come.

We didn't, obviously, do the things that the information officer was doing, because that wasn't our function. It wasn't our cultural function. After the big building was built and running, they, the IAS, put on a lot of good theater.

Edward R. Murrow's Visit to Tehranand His Appearance There was an Amazing Performance

I must say for the record that one of the programs that I was there to put on at the new Center was the visit of Edward R. Murrow. I guess he was within four or five months of his death then. It was an amazing performance. That was the inauguration of the new IAS. We moved up the inauguration to coincide with it his visit.

Q: Was he head of the Agency then?

NALLE: Yes. It coincided with the time he was on a trip and we could get him to come there. He came, and somebody had written a nice speech for him. He was obviously unwell. In fact, he had to be taken from the reception to where he was staying, to lie down, because he was beginning to fail. But he got up in the big outdoor theater, with inadequate light on the lectern, and he read his speech—but he edited it as he went along. He obviously felt he couldn't read through a whole 45-minute speech, and he edited it down to about 15 or 20 minutes. I was the only person who knew, because I had read it beforehand, that he wasn't giving the full speech. It was a most amazing performance. I've tried to do that myself subsequently, and it's terribly hard, as you know, to edit something while you're up there, trying to speak, without revealing that you're leaving vast parts of it out. Nobody knew he had cut it in half. It sounded like a great speech. Very impressive.

Q: Do you have any special or further to say about Edward R. Murrow during his visit? He was very well received, I take it. He was a big name.

NALLE: Yes, at that time. Actually, I don't think his name was terribly well known in Iran, but we had a very good turnout for it. The fact that the Americans thought he was very important made it important to the Iranians. That's true of any nation that had, obviously, great national pride.

Q: Perfectly true. Anything special about that Lyndon Johnson visit that you want to just throw in before we move on from Tehran on this go-round?

NALLE: No.

Q: Did he do any programs, or did he just visit the Shah and ride around?

NALLE: Yes, and he would jump out of the car and shake a lot of hands, which would drive the Savak people crazy, because, “Obviously, these terrorists are going to kill the American president right here on my watch.”

No, there are a lot of stories. One was at the reception at the foreign ministry. The ambassador asked me to interpret for Johnson. I'm sure my Persian was not good enough to interpret for him if he had been having a diplomatic discussion with the prime minister. But this was informal, so I did. I got beside him. He was an enormous man. I got beside him, and we started to go into the reception. An elderly gentleman who happened to be a member of the Binational Center board of directors was there and stuck out his hand. This man started to speak, and I started translating. Johnson turned and said to me, “Don't bother to translate, sonny. That's just the same kind of bull shit I hear in America.” [Laughter]

Q: Oh, dear. [Laughter] Where did you go after Tehran?

1963: Amman, Jordan, as Country PAO

NALLE: Directly to Amman, where I was PAO for two years, from 1963 to '65, I guess, before the '67 War, so that Jordan, in effect, included East Jerusalem and the West Bank and all those places that are now occupied by Israel. Once again it was basically a very agreeable place to be. Our second child, Susan, was born in a new private hospital there.

Q: Did you like the switch over from the cultural area to a PAOship? I know that's a promotion, considered within the Agency as a promotion, but it is a different kind of a job.

NALLE: Yes, and that's something that's always concerned me about the Agency. The same question arose when I was in Moscow. If you have a good CAO and a good IO, what's the PAO supposed to do with his time during the day? Whom is he supposed to talk to? How can you talk to, say, a New York Times correspondent or Pravda writer without undercutting the information officer who's supposed to be doing that? That's to use a simple example.

Yes, to some extent that was evident in Amman. What it leaves to the PAO is management, effectively, and that's important if you're going to do your job and you have to run the place. We had a big Center in Amman, which had to be run. CAO and assistant CAO had a lot to learn, and I think we did learn together. But you often do end up in an anomalous position. You go to the ambassador's meeting, and you can tell your people what happened, but in many ways it's much better if the ambassador is there to talk to the information officer, so when he goes to visit the editor, he knows what it is he's supposed to say. Since I had a cultural background and interest, very often I found myself undercutting the CAO. When we would give a dinner, for example, we would invite the people that should have been his natural, primary contacts.

We were talking about the triumvirate system of PAO, CAO, and IO. I think I just said it was really basically an unworkable construct. But it didn't work badly in Amman, partly

because of this thing I mentioned in connection with Syria. Our policy towards the Arab-Israeli situation was unacceptable to all Jordanians, so you had to leave that aside. There was no way of justifying our bias in favor of Israel—and explaining it was no help—so, by and large, we had to leave questions of policy aside. So the cultural activities, and the basic informational, rather than policy, work of the information officer, became more important. The cultural aspect was the channel through which you could communicate—maybe not always a political message, but communication, in any case.

Because of our special relationship with Jordan, one of the important things we did in the information area was to publicize American-assisted, or just simply Jordanian, efforts at development of the country. We made a film, for example, on the East Ghor Canal, which was a large project that took water at the top of the Jordan Valley and brought it down the east bank of the Jordan Valley, and irrigated all the land between that and the Jordan River in the center. We made a very attractive movie, which had considerable success, on that project.

The information officer and his JOT—and we had some good JOTs. It was a good learning process. For example, as JOT we had Marjorie Marilley, who is now Marjorie Ransom, and Bill Thompson, who later on was a CAO, and is now in charge of what's called “Arts America.”

Q: Something like that.

NALLE: Yes. Both of them very good, and Amman was their first post. I think they learned a lot, covering, for example, the various development projects around Jordan, which would result in film clips or in stories for an Arabic-language magazine published in Beirut, which had a USIA printing center in those days.

Q: The regional center.

NALLE: We also did a series, which was sort of my pet project, a series of small, intentionally modest pamphlets by Americans or Jordanians on the development problems of the country by prominent academics, for example, when they were American, or by the Jordanian head of the Jordan Valley Authority. These were distributed very selectively, in Arabic, to people who made a difference in the country. It was a very positive operating atmosphere if you once got by the political question of American-Mideast policy. That's one reason it was a good learning post, I think.

The Kennedy Assassination

I was there at the time of the Kennedy assassination, which was an interesting experience to live through, because you saw Kennedy through Jordanian eyes and got an idea of what America meant to Jordanians. It was a fairly close relationship. An interesting sidelight is that because the Jordanians were so interested in it, we didn't want to wait until the Agency produced that major film that they finally did produce. We got George Thompson down from Beirut, where he had some sort of a regional job, and he's a fantastically versatile person. George and I and the information officer and the whole staff put together a film on John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, which we then toured around to major cities of the country, within days of the assassination.

Q: Who was your IO then?

NALLE: Bob Ruggiero. Obviously it wasn't a classic, finished product, but it was mostly news clips and so forth put together with some narration, and it was tremendously successful. I remember we went to Irbid and showed it to 250 people. Irbid then was a not very distinguished city in northern Jordan. It's now quite a center of focus.

I guess what I am saying is really in response to your question: my experience in Meshed with the development program was a very good background for this development program

in Jordan. The most positive thing we could say about American relations with Jordan was that we were trying to get the country on its feet, setting aside policy for the moment.

Q: Did you encounter King Hussein at all?

NALLE: Oh, yes, not infrequently, at receptions, or he would invite embassy people down to one of his palaces in the Jordan Valley—for dancing. He liked parties. One had access to pretty much the elite of Jordan there, because partly of the King's special relationship with the United States, and you dealt with some very impressive people.

Q: Was the King very much in control there? How was it different, moving from a Shah to a King?

NALLE: Probably the same degree of control and the same mechanisms, but Jordan was different from Iran in that it was much smaller and theoretically much more controllable, but also I think the opposition forces were much better organized and much more volatile at that time than they were in Iran at that time. The external attempts to subvert the King were always in operation, so even if the situation was relatively tranquil in Jordan, you might have the Syrians working at that very moment to make them untranquil, to upset them.

I remember Gib Austin came out to visit the post. I took him to the airport when he was leaving.

Q: He was area director?

NALLE: He was the deputy director of the area at that time. I remember we were standing on the balcony overlooking the field at the old airport, and he asked me about King Hussein, because he had heard all these stories about the opposition and so forth. I said, “You know, it looks to me now that he can't last for more than three months.” [Laughter] That was in 1963.

Q: He's a survivor, all right. His wives seem not to survive so well.

NALLE: Yes.

Q: It makes a very interesting transition. As someone who has worked primarily in the cultural field overseas, I'm interested in your comments about the PAO-CAO-IO relationship. The interest of the PAO does affect very much how the CAO can function in the capital city.

NALLE: Yes.

Q: Either they dabble or they really understand what the CAO is all about.

NALLE: It depends largely on the temperament and the talents of the individuals in each job. If you have a very good CAO, you've got to step back and let him do it, much as it may —

Q: But it's often more fun to be the CAO. [Laughter]

NALLE: Yes. If you have a weak CAO, you've got to control.

Q: You left Amman in '65?

NALLE: 1965. Yes.

Q: Then?

1965: Washington: Program Coordinator for Near Eastern Area, Then, 1966, Deputy, Then Assistant Director, Near East

NALLE: I came back here to the area office, to Washington, and my first job in the area office was what they called program coordinator.

Q: This is in the NEA area, right?

NALLE: NEA, Near Eastern area. That's a dreadful job, but very useful if you want to understand how the Agency works. I did that for a year, year and a half, then became the deputy area director under Alan Carter. When Alan left, I became area director. That was only for about a year. That whole period was '66 to early '71. Washington is necessary. Everybody should come back and do it.

Q: It's more fun to be overseas, though, isn't it?

NALLE: It's more fun to be overseas, yes. You get a little tired of the bureaucracy and its problems when you're in Washington, but you learn a lot that will help you when you go out later, too.

I should tell you how I got assigned to Moscow.

1971, Moscow, and Why Nalle Went There

Q: Yes. Did Moscow follow after—

NALLE: Yes. Frank Shakespeare, by that time, was director of the Agency. I think he'd just come in about the time I got named as area director. I don't think he was ever terribly comfortable with that, because I assume he knew I was not a Republican and perhaps didn't think the way he thought. In any case, after he and I had been in proximity for a year, I guess, he as director and I as area director of Near East, he said one day that he had a new policy. He announced this to the staff, that anybody who wanted to aspire to top-level positions in the Agency—and I quote directly—"had to feel the red menace in his gut." [Laughter] And he said, "To start my implementation of this policy, I am going to send Dave Nalle to Moscow as the cultural attach#."

To me it was very much of a brierpatch situation, because I was fascinated with the idea of going to Moscow. It never occurred to me that we might go there, because I didn't know the language. I had only the normal American familiarity with the place and the culture. Frank seemed to feel that if not exactly a punishment, this was a very severe task that he was placing on me. But I thought it was a great idea. Since he and the deputy director, Henry Loomis, felt that I was making this great sacrifice, I, more clever than I usually am, said to them, “Okay.” (I'm not sure I put it exactly this way.) “I want to make one condition, however, that you have to teach both me and my wife the language.” They said, “Okay.” I said, “As a real student. She has to be a recognized student.”

Q: This was in the early days for wives going into language training.

NALLE: I believe Peggy was the first USIA wife ever, as a full-fledged, enrolled student.

Q: That's been a real breakthrough, I think.

NALLE: Yes. The interesting sidelight was that Henry Loomis said, “Okay, you go and find a place that will take both of you as students, and we'll send you there.” So I went to FSI, and they said, “We'll take you, but your wife will have to come on a space-available basis.” I said, “No good.” Monterey was the same thing.

So I went back to Henry Loomis. He said, “Anywhere in the world. You go find it.” [Laughter] That was the kind of gesture Henry liked to make, I think.

So I went to London and found a suitable school. Of course, paying money, they would take us both. So we spent that year of 1971-72, the academic year, studying Russian at the Polytechnic of Central London. That was nice for us, though it was terribly hard work. We worked all the time, because we were by then in our forties, and that's late for learning Russian, particularly.

Q: Especially a hard language.

NALLE: Yes, which Russian is. We worked all day every day, all night. We did homework every night.

Q: At least there were both of you at it, so that's a great help.

NALLE: Yes. It was harrowing, and it wasn't as good as if we had studied in Monterey or FSI, because it was not designed for our kind of work, but we worked hard and became at least competent in Russian.

We went to Moscow in 1972, which was the beginning of detente and a relatively pleasant time to be there. Pleasant in the sense that you could actually do some things, which had not been possible before.

Q: Who was the PAO then in Moscow?

NALLE: Andy Falkiewicz. He left after I'd been there about three or four months, and I was promoted to PAO. They don't call it PAO; they call it counselor for press and cultural affairs.

Q: Who was ambassador then?

NALLE: Jacob Beam. There was a long hiatus when Spike Dubs was charg# d'affaires. Spike Dubs was later killed in the Afghan situation.

Q: Yes.

NALLE: The ambassador who came after him was Walter Stoessel, who died last year.

Q: You said this was a period of detente, so it made things a little bit different. How long were you in Moscow?

NALLE: Three years.

Q: From 1972 to '75?

NALLE: We were there two years and then Jim Keogh asked us if we'd like to stay for another year. By that time we were getting much better in Russian and were enthusiastic about it. I must say it was really too long, at least for the Russia of those days, because even though it was detente, it was still a very pressured situation, as I said earlier. Leaving and going to Helsinki, you felt just a wonderful lifting of oppression.

Q: How often did you get out?

NALLE: We should have gotten out more, but we got out, I guess, once a year.

Q: That's all?

NALLE: Yes. Well, to Helsinki, more often. But really out; we went to Greece one year.

Program Efforts Limited by Russian Restrictions But Certain Methods Proved Reasonably Successful

Q: What kinds of things did you do in Moscow at that time? Not you particularly, but what was going on by way of USIS programs?

NALLE: Of course, there was no facility, no center that people could come into, because people can't come in—couldn't at that time, certainly. There's now talk of starting one, reciprocally. But the real challenge was to communicate, how to communicate with this public that wasn't allowed to come in to you to get information, a public that was being communicated with by the Voice of America, and a public that couldn't communicate with you comfortably on the political level, but could on a cultural level.

I set up what I thought—what I still think—was the necessary route to go, and it involved a couple of things. One, it seemed to me that we couldn't contact a lot of people directly, but we did know who some of the people were and what their jobs were and why we wanted

to contact them. We could get those names and we could meet them officially, but seldom ever, at the beginning at least, socially.

So I established a contact management system with great difficulty, because the Agency was not yet into it. I finally got a “key-sort” system. I don't know whether you know that, but it's like a primitive computer which functions with cards, with holes around the edges, and you knock out some of those holes. You put a spear into the system and turn it upside down, and the cards you want will all drop down. But it's just like a computer. Of course, now you have, I assume, computerized contact management systems. But we set that up, and I brought in a succession of Americans' wives to be the “contact management operators,” let's say.

We began to fill up our cards, and you could then write right on the card, which was very satisfying: “We gave So and So such and such on April 14th. On May 14, he came to the embassy for such and such a movie.” You got a whole picture of your contact with these people, even though you seldom saw them face to face, except maybe in an audience or, as you saw them on the list, as a recipient of Amerika magazine. We also started a Russian edition of Dialogue magazine, which at that time was a serious intellectual publication. Wonderful Juri Jelagin, back here, translated and edited it, and was very enthusiastic about the whole process. That was, I suppose, typical of our best efforts, because here was a magazine at a high cultural level, which was the appropriate level for the Soviet elite, the intelligentsia. We would send it out specifically to them by name—the fact registered, of course, on their key-sort cards.

I also tried to start a program of targeted presentation of books. We did this successfully, I think, on one level. We needed to remodel our USIS premises in the embassy, and I got the Agency to agree to send in an architect. We got an architect named Hans Hohlein from Vienna, who is now world-class; John Jacobs helped us with that. I'm afraid our project wasn't world class. But he came and designed the “USIS” premises. It's actually called “P&C,” the press and cultural section. So that each of the officers had his own section and

was surrounded by bookcases with books related to his particular field, and tapes and records and the whole thing. We had a very small—about the size of this room—viewing room for showing films and videotapes. The architect was necessary because you had to get all this into a very small space.

Q: Because you were part of that embassy building. Everybody's all together.

NALLE: Right. But it was really very attractive. When you had a good officer sitting in the right desk, and he knew that he was to contact people on education, for example, and he had the materials to do it, and if he was energetic and whatever, in my mind it focused his attention on what he was supposed to be doing, and he had the equipment to do it, the tools to do it. That, put together with the contact management system, I think resulted in greatly improved communication, much of which was never face to face. It couldn't be.

Q: Did you get any feedback?

Agency Failed in providing Continuing Support for Critical Book Presentation Effort

NALLE: As I started to say, then I encouraged those individuals and myself to find exceptionally worthwhile people to cultivate more closely, if possible. For example, I got to know one of the leading literary critics in Moscow, and I said to him, “Look. I know you can't get books. I can get you the books you want if you tell me what they are.”

His reaction was, “Oh, you mean you'll send me propaganda?” I said, “No. I'll send you book reviews. You tell me what it is you need, and I will get the Agency to send it out.” And I was able to do that for about half a year. Then the Agency lost interest and it took more work back here than they were willing to put into this sort of thing.

I wrote to them and asked, “What is more important to you and to us than to communicate with the elite intelligentsia of the Soviet Union?” But the Agency was not geared up to worry specifically about a post in this way.

Q: Not even Moscow? That seems funny to me.

NALLE: Because the person who knew the books wasn't the person in the desk job. So that meant, I assume, that somebody, like the area director or the deputy area director, had to be behind this whole thing.

Q: The desk has to push.

NALLE: Then the desk officer had to push the ICS person, or whatever it's called, who would choose the books. Someone had to know what books to choose, what a Russian member of the intelligentsia would want to read and would find worth reading. It just took too much work, apparently.

Q: Was it all right for them to receive all these books, or were they about to get into trouble because of that?

NALLE: It had become all right by then. It was culture, so it was all right. I wasn't trying to send him books on democracy versus communism. No doubt he got questioned, because our apartment was bugged. We set it up at a cocktail party in our apartment. But he could say, “These are cultural books. See them? There's nothing subversive about them.” To me, that was the way you had to communicate.

U.S. Embassy Could be Used as a Cultural Center Attracting Soviet Intellectual Elite

The only real kind of cultural center program that we could do was at the ambassador's residence, where we did put on films. You get so frustrated when you're out at the end of the line. We pleaded with the Agency to send us new films that we could show, or send us old films that we could show. They said they could send us new films, but we couldn't show them. So we finally got them to send recent films that we could show. That was a tremendous success, because the Soviets, as we know, are film crazy. At that time their

own good films were still suppressed. We would do films or we'd do other things at the ambassador's residence that would bring in elites.

Q: They could go to the residence, I take it, safely?

NALLE: Yes. Yes.

Q: More or less safely?

NALLE: Yes. Things had let up to the extent that they could. Even dissidents could go there. Dissidents went anywhere, practically anywhere, but dissidents could be included in a party there, and non-dissidents, mainstream intellectuals, of which there were some very good ones. The fact that they were mainstream didn't mean they were uninteresting.

I think the most fun we had was putting on—the Department got a collection of paintings from the Metropolitan and other museums to hang around the residence, really good stuff, and much of it contemporary or recent. We put on a real happening for that, with Tom Freudenheim, who was then, I think, curator of the Baltimore Art Museum. Anyway, he's now deputy secretary or assistant secretary of the Smithsonian [Institution]. He came over with his wife, and we opened the exhibit. It was a two-week long happening, with videotapes about contemporary American art, with tea and drinks and the whole works. It was a wonderful ambiance. Tom would lead tours around the rooms, explaining the paintings and so forth. It was just a lovely atmosphere to be in. I went a number of times on his tours. We got all sorts of good contacts in that the embassy hadn't seen ever before, who could come into this thing because, again, it was a cultural activity. The basic invitation list dropped down from our key-sort system.

Q: There is all this discussion, and even some letters to the editor, about the role of books and libraries in developing a sense of the importance of democracy and democracy as the real, the right way to go, in Eastern Europe, as a motivator of the current events that have gone on in the last six months in Eastern Europe. Given your experience in Moscow

and the fact that you say you could deal with these people culturally, but not politically, to what extent do you think this kind of impact from the United States is really a part of this discussion of democracy and resurgence of democratic ideas in Eastern Europe?

NALLE: To what extent do I think the resurgence of those ideas is the result of—

Q: That's right. There's been letters to the editor that USIA contributed to this because all over Eastern Europe—now, you were in Moscow, of course, but in Eastern Europe there were these various programs and also, of course, in Moscow, which has led to the recognition of the importance of democracy and a preference for democracy over what they've been having.

NALLE: Short answer, obviously. I think that a successful USIA program overseas must necessarily communicate with the intelligentsia, the elite of a country, and to do that, the content of your communication must be up to their level. If you are funded and if you're intellectually able to do that, if you know what books to choose or what films to show or whatever, then you can have successful communication, and it follows, I think, that you will have an impact of the kind that you're talking about. I think, undoubtedly, the distribution of things we distributed in the Soviet Union had that kind of impact on some people. Whether it's the people we now see in the vanguard of the Soviet Union, I don't know. But you had to try to do it, and you had to try to reach them if you were going to communicate successfully with the society, because they process it and communicate it to the rest of society, obviously.

I think the pamphlet series I did in Jordan, modest though it was, did that kind of thing. And I think that's what we should concentrate on. Sometimes, as I think I probably have, wittingly or not, suggested, your communication may be oblique. You may communicate through a very good recorded concert for somebody who is deprived of music, and that puts him in—how to put it? That is the only kind of communication perhaps that your relationship with him can tolerate. But it will create a bond between you and him—not

personally, necessarily, but in the abstract. “Here's American culture. I have had some access to the best of American culture. The other aspects of American culture may be of a similar quality.”

If he's also a politician or a teacher or whatever, then he may, as a result, have a more open mind towards those other aspects of America.

Q: And you're opening up a new world of ideas, emotions, cultural emotions, and so forth, for which they've had no other kind of opportunity to gain access. Therefore, the suggested freedom, I suppose.

NALLE: In the Soviet Union, it was as if the people were on an island and they were deprived of all normal communication with the rest of the cultural world. The paradox, of course, is that nowhere was the Voice of America more popular than in the Soviet Union. Now, I guess, the Voice of America is becoming less interesting, less popular to the Soviets, because other things are coming in. People in the rest of the world, India—what is the motivation to listen to the Voice of America? Very little. But in the Soviet Union, there was a tremendous motivation. Off and on, I think the VOA lived up to it. Perhaps it didn't do as well as the BBC, because the BBC had somewhat less and fewer constraints.

The Repressing Atmosphere of the USSR is Nerve-Wracking

Q: You obviously said some fascinating things about the programs you developed in your three years in Moscow. Do you have any kind of overall comment to make about your time there? Was it, in personal terms, very difficult? I mean for you and for Peggy. What did Peggy have to do in order to function? She had already been through a lot by this time with some of those posts. Did you travel to Leningrad?

NALLE: You reveal the natural bias against the Middle East. Most of those posts were ideal places to live, as far as the climate and comforts. And Peggy was very much

involved in the kind of programming I'm talking about, which was absorbing and, I believe, rewarding for her, too.

Q: Part of that was in listening to Tom Tuch talk about this. He talked about some of the problems of importing food. I didn't know to what extent you imported food in some of your posts in the Middle East. He talked about this for his family time in Moscow.

Did you travel around? Did you get to Leningrad on and off? Did you get into the central Soviet Union?

NALLE: Yes. Sure, as much as we could. A lot of the area was off-limits. That wasn't exactly the question you posed earlier.

Q: I've really got two things going that have to do with the personal hazards of functioning day to day.

NALLE: Very difficult. That's why I think I mentioned, or started to talk about the third year. The third year became really quite debilitating. It's too long to spend in the kind of pressure situation that that was at that time, still, even though it was detente. There was a listening device, I'm quite sure, a beeper attached to our car, so that it was never unknown to the authorities where our car was. That was symbolic of the kind of awareness you had of being watched all the time.

It was six months after I left the Soviet Union before I could sit down in front of a coffee table and say anything I felt like saying, because in the Soviet Union, I knew that our coffee table, or something like it, had the bug in it. You always thought first before you spoke or said anything, even to your kids. Our two children were with us, at the beginning, at least, in Moscow, and it was very hard for them, because they couldn't mix with the population. They did have their Canadian-American school, but it was a very artificial life.

Peggy, already knowing Russian, did get to meet particularly some of the unofficial art community, which was interesting for her and interesting for them. It was a good relationship. But still, it's a very restrictive life. It takes a toll on your nerves and your disposition and just about everything. So you do have to get out and you do have to recover if you've been there a while.

The food, you know, gets boring. It was better then, 15 years ago, than it is now, the food supply and market in Moscow. But there were enough alternatives. It wasn't really a hardship, because you could order from Stockman's in Helsinki or Denmark supply houses, or you could go to the dollar gastronome, as it's called. You could put together enough food, and you had a servant provided by the state, a Soviet, who could do the cooking for you if you wanted that. So from that point of view, I don't think life was hard, but life was hard psychologically and physically. It was enervating.

I remember just noticing that we had been out every night for six weeks at one time, mostly receptions at Spaso House or some other kind of a thing the foreign community was doing or whatever—theater or something like that. But being out every night for six weeks, that's enough. [Laughter]

Q: You want to stay home, don't you? [Laughter] What about traveling around outside of Moscow?

NALLE: It was always difficult, but it could be rewarding if you could get permission. I tried to go to Central Asia as often as I could because of my particular interests there. I was given permission about 50 percent of the time I asked. That's one of the characteristics of Soviet society that it has been totally arbitrary in the way things happen. They'll just say, “No.” Or they'll say, “For reasons of a temporary nature, no.” And you expected it and you asked again later.

When we got the Soviet permission, we got, of course, to Leningrad, where eventually we had a branch office, and to places in the Caucasus—Tbilisi, for example.

Q: You went out to the Caucasus primarily as tourists?

Value of USIA Visiting Cultural Exhibits in USSR

NALLE: No, primarily in connection with visiting cultural attractions, and we had some great ones. As soon as detente opened things up, we had the New York City Ballet, the San Francisco Symphony, Arena Stage, things like that, which everybody had to be involved in. And the big exhibits, traveling exhibits, which went to various cities. We went to a city you've probably never heard of, called Ufa. Ufa is the capital of the Bashkir autonomous republic, and it's right in the middle of the Russian republic out there. I'm not sure where it is. They're Tartars. We went there because the exhibit went there. We opened the exhibit, gave a little talk. And you had these wonderful kids who were the guides. So whenever we could, we took that excuse to go.

Q: You think those exhibits, which took a lot of doing to put them together and it cost a lot of money, were very worthwhile?

NALLE: Yes, if they're well done. At the beginning of the three years, we had more trouble than later, because detente was just beginning to take hold. There was a lot of provocation. A lot of provocations worked against the guides. They'd be entrapped in various ways, and one fellow had to be sent home because he got entrapped. But that fell off markedly in the second or third year.

One thing I instituted at that time, I persuaded the Agency to send out a regular Agency officer to be, in effect, the cultural attach# at the exhibit. The first one was Jack Harrod. Do you know Jack?

Q: Yes.

NALLE: I think he was a little skeptical of the whole thing, but he was very good. He was just what I wanted, because he was intelligent, he spoke Russian, and he was active. His job, as far as I was concerned, was to go out and just be the American representative who didn't have to work all day at the stand, but could get to know the community. What I hoped Was that he would feed back to us names of the intellectual leaders of each city, so we could stick it into our card machine and then communicate with those people subsequently. That did work out to a certain extent, and I believe they've done that ever since. You know, there's a coda to all this: Peggy and I have signed up to go to Dushanbe, Tajikistan, with the exhibit that's going there in the fall, to be the reports officers, Peggy speaking Russian and me speaking, in this case, Persian to the Tajiks, which is their native language.

Q: How wonderful! This proves the very good life one can have after the Agency.

Now let's see. We're in the mid-1970s. You came home after Moscow.

1975: Return to Washington: NEA and E

NALLE: Yes, I came back to be—the only job I ever asked for from the Agency I didn't get at that time. I thought I'd like to be head of—is it called ICS?

Q: Yes. When I was in ICS, it was called ICS.

NALLE: Yes. So I wrote to Jim Keogh and said, “That's the job I'd like.”

He said, “No, I want you to be head of Near East again.”

So I came back to that job, which was, you know, probably wiser—when I took that job, I got to know the bureaucracy in ICS better, and maybe I wouldn't have been happy there, but it was the kind of work that interested me, what they did in that section of the Agency.

Q: I think you would have been very good at it from your background. I worked in ICS. I had the political and social processes element. I think your background and your interests would have made you—

NALLE: But that didn't happen. I stayed, I guess, from 1975 to '78.

Q: At NEA.

1978: Deputy Associate Director Bureau of Educationand Cultural Affairs

NALLE: At NEA. Then there was the amalgamation of CU and the Agency, and I went over there to be the first deputy associate director, with Alice Ilchman being the director of the successor to CU, in effect, which had under it, of course, ICS and various other things.

Q: That was a trying business, wasn't it?

NALLE: It was tiresome in ways, because there was so much foot-dragging and back-biting.

Q: You were involved in all kinds of things which really weren't educational exchange and all of that.

NALLE: I think the worst thing was how much under-the-table resistance there was to the amalgamation, and people came over from CU and were never really happy. They had some cause not to be, I guess, but it exaggerated the cause in many cases. It worked against the successful coming together of the two things. I think essentially it was the right move to make, to come together, although I must say, when I went back to the Agency two years ago, maybe three—see, I've been retired since 1980. I spent only two years in that job. When I went back, it must be three years ago now, to do the Agency's observance of the Fulbright 40th anniversary, I necessarily got a close look into the workings of what's

now called the E Bureau, I guess, and those animosities and antagonisms were all still there. In fact, they were even worse than they were at the outset.

Thoughts on What USIA Could and Should Do Better

Q: We're just about ready to close up here with David Nalle. David, what thoughts do you have as you look back on your illustrious career in the Agency and in overseas information work?

NALLE: I've got lots of thoughts. I won't give them all.

Q: You can go, “one, two, three, four,” if you want.

NALLE: USIA, as I knew it, was a tremendously seductive career. It's a wonderful way to live overseas, to actually be paid, to actually have to communicate with people in another culture. But more and more, it seems to me that it is essential for the Agency to take its job seriously, and its job is communication. For a person to be able to communicate in another culture, he or she has to know something about that culture and he has to know the language if he's going to be successful.

The second part of taking it seriously is that the content that the person has to communicate, has to be of a level that is up to the level at which his audience functions. That's one reason, for example, that Peggy has been such an asset, unpaid, to USIA.

I'm afraid that neither one of those things is really carried out by the Agency to the extent that it should be. The training is better now than it was when I was young, but I don't feel, still, that it's as good as it should be. I still feel that the quality of the product that the Agency tries to disseminate is not as good as it should be. There are a lot of reasons for that. It's hard to overcome. I understand that. But that's what the Agency should be striving for, I believe.

Q: Does this mean people really should be staying in places longer? If you're going to take on a tough language, you should have the opportunity to return, for instance, to use a tough language and not be held as much of a specialist?

NALLE: Absolutely. Yes. But there are world languages like Arabic, and we do pretty well, I guess, but we don't have enough Arabists who are out there, and we don't give them the content they need to communicate in Arabic the way we should. It must come through what I said that I'm not particularly devoted to the idea of targeted hard communication; I'm much more into purposeful cross-cultural communication, for the content of that cross-cultural communication to be broader, rather than targeted and specific. I think we don't get very far trying to tell somebody something that is political and specific—that disagrees with what he believes. There are oblique ways of approaching it and getting the result, I think. That is for another tape.

Q: Okay. We'll have to have another discussion. Thank you very much, David Nalle.

End of interview